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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 003779

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STATE FOR EAP AND EAP/MTS  
USPACOM ALSO FOR FPA HUSO  
JOINT STAFF J5 (WILKES/ROBINSON/CLEMMONS)  
OSD/ISA/AP (LAWLESS/TOOLAN/BAILEY)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/06/2016

TAGS: PHUM PREL MOPS KCRM PINS RP

SUBJECT: CHARGE UNDERSCORES IMPORTANCE OF EJK RESOLUTION TO FILIPINO LEADERS

REF: A. MANILA 3140  
B. MANILA 3203  
C. MANILA 3247  
D. MANILA 3346  
E. MANILA 3404  
F. MANILA 2697

Classified By: (U) Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Paul W. Jones  
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. Charge d'Affaires Jones reinforced the importance of Philippine Government (GRP) action in solving the recent spate of extrajudicial killings (EJKs) of leftist activists in the Philippines to current and former Filipino leaders, including National Security Advisor Gonzales, Foreign Secretary Romulo, and former Philippine President Ramos. At Charge's request, SOCPAC Commander also reiterated our concerns to the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff General Esperon. These recent meetings reinforced an earlier demarche by Ambassador Kenney to the same officials plus President Arroyo and new Chief of the Philippine National Police (PNP) Calderon. These current and former officials all claimed that the GRP and the Arroyo administration are seized with the question of EJKs and aware of its potential effects on the overall US-GRP relationship. Gonzales admitted possible AFP or PNP involvement in some EJKs, but he and General Esperon said the killings were more likely due to possible New People's Army (NPA) purges. Gonzales also indicated that the GRP had taken steps to invite an international investigative body to assuage international and domestic doubts that the GRP is addressing the problem. Former President Ramos called attention to the creation of the Melo Commission, a new independent commission that will oversee and assist in investigations of EJKs headed by retired Supreme Court Justice, Jose A. Melo. See septel for Charge's meeting with the Melo Commission. End Summary.

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Gonzales: GRP Suffering from a "Credibility Problem"  
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12. (C) Charge told National Security Advisor Norberto Gonzales in their September 5 meeting that Ambassador Kenney had conveyed to him growing USG concern about reports of EJKs, which were having a significant impact in Washington. Gonzales recognized that the GRP was suffering from a "credibility problem," and claimed that President Arroyo and her Cabinet were committed to stopping the series of murders of leftist activists.

**¶3.** (C) Observing that EJKs represent a breakdown in institutions, Gonzales said, "It will be difficult to govern the country if this gets out of control." He said he took the issue personally because of allegations by some leftists that he had authorized the killings. Gonzales noted that the Philippines needed a credible investigatory body that would be believed by world and domestic Filipino public opinion, and claimed the GRP had sounded out Spain and other European countries about participating in a fact-finding commission to discover the truth behind the murders. (Note: Embassy calls to both Spanish and Dutch Embassies in Manila indicate that the GRP has "informally" proposed something like this to the Spanish, but that practical discussions on funding sources or membership of such a commission have not taken place yet. End note.)

**¶4.** (C) Gonzales speculated that while elements of the military and police may be involved, the Communist Party of the Philippines/New People's Army (CPP/NPA), some politicians, and even organized crime might also be taking advantage of the opportunity to "settle accounts." He vowed that any AFP or PNP officer found to be involved in the killings would be prosecuted. "If it is Palparan (Major General Jovito Palparan, the outgoing commander of the 7th Infantry Division, who has been accused of human rights abuses) so be it," Gonzales asserted.

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Romulo: GRP on Top of the Issue  
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**¶5.** (U) In a September 6 phone call, Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo asserted to the Charge that the GRP is on top of the EJK issue. He claimed President Arroyo very much

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wants to see it resolved quickly. Secretary Romulo noted that he was glad the Charge had discussed the question with National Security Advisor Gonzales as well. The Charge stressed Ambassador Kenney's concern about EJKs and noted that she is raising the matter in her Washington consultations.

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Esperon: EJKs Intended to Discredit GRP  
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**¶6.** (C) At Charge's request, SOCPAC Commander Major General David Fridovich relayed Embassy concerns about EJKs to General Hermogenes Esperon, the AFP Chief of Staff. In a one-on-one conversation with Fridovich, General Esperon strongly denied any personal knowledge of government-sponsored EJKs. He further expressed his unequivocal personal belief that EJKs violate the rule of law and are counterproductive to GRP reform efforts. General Esperon stated that he is also keenly aware of the negative primary and potential secondary effects these allegations have on US-GRP relations. He opined that groups seeking to discredit the GRP committed these acts, citing possible incidents of internal purging by CPP/NPA insurgents.

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Ramos: No One to be Shielded from Responsibility  
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**¶7.** (U) In an August 30 meeting with the Charge, former President Fidel Ramos praised retired Supreme Court Justice Jose A. Melo, who has been appointed chair of an independent commission to investigate the EJKs, commonly referred to as the Melo Commission. Ramos reminisced that he had appointed Justice Melo to the Supreme Court when he was President. Ramos underscored his concern about EJKs and pointed to his public condemnations of the killings. He noted that he personally handed Chairman Melo a congratulations letter that highlighted the importance of this new EJK probe. Ramos believed neither General Esperon nor PNP Task Force Usig

Chief Avelino "Sonny" Razon would "shield" high ranking members of the AFP or PNP who might be involved in EJKs.

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Comment  
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18. (U) Embassy continues to underscore to senior GRP officials the importance of quickly resolving the EJK issue and apprehending suspects in these killings. The Ambassador has personally raised this issue with President Arroyo (ref b) and with the new PNP Chief Oscar Calderon (ref c). The establishment of the Melo Commission and PNP Task Force Usig are welcome moves but it remains to be seen whether either entity has the ability to gain control of EJKs and bring perpetrators to justice.

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Jones